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SUBJECT: REPORTING CABLE ON FEBRUARY 24-25 WORKING GROUP ON
RESETTLEMENT MEETING

11. (U) The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Kingdom - current chair - convened a meeting of the Working Group on Resettlement (WGR) at the Palais des Nations in Geneva February 24 - 25. Representatives of 20 governments as well as UNHCR headquarters and field office staff engaged in resettlement participated. The United States was represented by Terry Rusch, PRM Director of Refugee Admissions in the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, Department of State; Jennifer Higgins, Deputy Director of the Refugee Affairs Division, USCIS in the Department of Homeland Security; Barbara Day, PRM's Domestic Resettlement Chief; and Melissa Pitotti of the Office of Refugee and Migration Affairs at the U.S. Permanent Mission in Geneva.

12. (U) UNHCR updated the group on resettlement referrals/departures progress in 2008 when it submitted for consideration over 120,000 refugees to resettlement countries (a 22 percent increase over 2007. 65,000 refugees referred by UNHCR departed for resettlement countries in 2008) a 31 percent increase over 2007. The most significant developments since UNHCR distributed its Global Projected Resettlement Needs Document in June are: 1) in light of the security situation in Pakistan, virtually no progress can be made in utilizing resettlement for the 171,000 Afghans there identified as in need of resettlement; and 2) UNHCR has revised downward the 2009 resettlement need for Iraqis from 86,000 to 60-65,000. The global economic crisis is taking its toll both on UNHCR's ability to continue to increase referrals and resettlement countries ability to receive and integrate them. Iceland and Ireland have already had to put their programs on hold and other governments may need to reduce their intake.

13. (U) There was discussion of progress in responding to UNHCR's October "Flash Appeal" to meet the resettlement needs

of vulnerable Palestinians from Iraq currently residing in difficult circumstances in Al Waleed, Al Tanf and Al Hol camps. UNHCR's efforts to refer these Palestinians have thus far resulted in referrals for about half of the original 2,300 to various resettlement countries but another 1,150 places are needed. For countries requiring in-person interviews, the pace of off-take will depend on the establishment of workable logistical arrangements. The U.S. reported that various "platforms" are being explored to facilitate processing of the several hundred Palestinians already referred to the U.S. The recent opening of the Evacuation Transit Center (ETC) in Timisoara, Romania will allow the transfer of some of the most vulnerable Palestinian cases in a matter of weeks. UNHCR also reported that other governments have offered use of their territory for this purpose on an ad hoc basis.

¶4. (U) The issue of the integration of resettled refugees continues to be of interest to many resettlement countries. Some include "integration potential" in their selection process. UNHCR's Agenda for Protection "calls upon states to put in place policies to ensure that resettlement runs in tandem with a vigorous integration policy. Language training, education, vocational training, employment, support for family reunification) these and many other activities are the building blocks of integration. And while resettlement is a way of protecting refugees and a tangible sign of responsibility-sharing by states, there is no doubt that refugees also make important contributions to their new societies." A draft longitudinal survey document to measure resettlement outcomes was distributed and will be further discussed at the Annual Tripartite Consultations (ATC) meeting in June. (In light of the fact that NGOs often play a significant role in the integration process, a few NGO representatives were included in the WGR meeting which is normally limited to governments and UNHCR. Many more NGO representatives will participate in June.)

¶5. (U) WGR breakout sessions were devoted to topics including: the special challenges resettlement countries are encountering integrating Iraqis; best practices in the integration of vulnerable groups; assisting refugees to find employment and contribute to the community; and a discussion of improvements needed in "twinning" arrangements between established and emerging resettlement countries.

¶6. (U) The U.S. hosted the five-country (U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, U.K.) dinner on February 24. The U.S. reps briefed on current funding limitations for the UNHCR Resettlement Initiative that would result in our requiring UNHCR to meet U.S. referrals targets for each funded location before resettlement referrals are made to other resettlement countries. This could result in a significant reduction in referrals to countries that do not fund UNHCR's referrals capacity. At the request of various overseas processing partners, the U.S. also identified areas where delays in resettlement country decisions on medical cases are causing extreme hardship for refugees and the protracted delays in the off-take of approved cases is complicating refugee camp dynamics. We are providing case specific information to the countries in question.

¶7. (U) The Annual Tripartite Consultations (ATC) are scheduled for June 30) July 2 in Geneva.

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